



## **Iraq's Electoral Preparations and Processes\***

### **Report No. 3**

#### **Highlights for October**

- The Council of Representatives finally approves the distribution of electoral constituencies in all eighteen governorates.
- IHEC, awaiting confirmation of the electoral budget, continues with electoral preparations, including resumption of biometric voter registration and preparations for an audit of electoral IT and results management systems.
- New IHEC Directors-General and managers of governorate electoral offices assume their functions; further key positions remain to be finalised.

#### **Electoral Legislation**

On 24 October, following successive parliamentary sessions on the topic, the Council of Representatives approved the distribution of electoral constituencies for sixteen of Iraq's governorates. The apportioning of constituencies in the remaining two governorates, Ninewa and Kirkuk, were approved on 26 and 29 October, respectively, following intensive discussions among political actors, including leaders of political blocs and those governorates' Members of Parliaments.

Under the provisions endorsed by the Council of Representatives, governorates will be divided into several constituencies, the number for each governorate corresponding to its number of seats reserved for female parliamentarians. There will be a total of 83 constituencies nationwide. The delineation of constituency boundaries will be guided by the location of food ration centres and voter registration centres, grouping one or more to form each electoral constituency. Constituencies will each comprise 3-5 parliamentary seats (one of which will be reserved for a female MP), according to population density. Voters will vote for individual candidates, with seats allocated to those candidates receiving the highest number of votes (in electoral parlance, the system of Single Non-Transferable Vote).

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\* This report, the third in a regular monthly series, is prepared pursuant to UN Security Council Resolution 2522, adopted on 29 May 2020. In extending UNAMI's mandate, the Council instructs that the Special Representative of the Secretary General and UNAMI shall: "further advise, assist and support the Government of Iraq and the Independent High Electoral Commission with efforts to plan and execute genuinely free and fair Iraqi-led, Iraqi-owned elections and referenda, including through regular technical reviews and detailed reporting on electoral preparations and processes, as part of the Secretary-General's regular reporting cycle."



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The complete electoral legislation (the text approved last December and the annexes just finalised) will now be submitted by the Council of Representatives for endorsement by the President. It will come into force once published in the official gazette.

Since this legislation is integral to the electoral process, this is a significant and welcome step forward in electoral preparations.

### **Electoral Budget**

The Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) has yet to receive from the government the funds needed to organise the elections. UNAMI understands that IHEC has prepared and submitted its budget as part of the government's overall 2020-2021 budget process, and is awaiting approval and the release of funds. In a meeting between the IHEC Board of Commissioners Chairman and the Prime Minister on 28 October, the electoral budget was top of the agenda. The Prime Minister underlined the government's readiness to meet the financial requirements to enable delivery of free and fair elections, including, in coordination with the Ministry of Finance, the release to IHEC of the electoral budget.

### **Recruitment of IHEC Personnel**

The Council of Ministers has endorsed the appointment of the four IHEC Directors-General, all of whom have now assumed office: Deputy Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) for Technical Affairs, Deputy CEO for Administration/Finance, Secretary-General of the Board of Commissioners, and the Head of the Political Parties Directorate. Managers of governorate electoral offices have also all been appointed and (not requiring Cabinet endorsement) have assumed office. Several other senior IHEC roles at HQ have also been filled, although some are still on a temporary basis, including key operational positions.

Despite some challenges initially encountered in the appointment of Directors-General and governorate managers, IHEC recruitment is nearing completion. This will enable IHEC to focus squarely now on electoral preparations, including on-the-job capacity-building for new officials and staff. At IHEC's request, UNAMI is preparing an induction training package for newly-appointed electoral officials.

### **Status of Technical Preparations**

#### **1. Biometric voter registration**

IHEC has received governmental and health authority approval to re-open its voter registration centres (VRCs). There are currently 1,079 VRCs country-wide, all now open and working to distribute the voter cards undistributed during previous registration processes. IHEC records indicate that 15.2 million voters (of an electorate of 26.6 million) have completed the biometric data collection process.



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The challenge now is for IHEC to complete biometric data collection for the remaining voters before the elections. IHEC is negotiating with its contracted supplier for the reactivation of the systems and equipment necessary to resume biometric data collection. UNAMI has been providing technical support to IHEC in this process and has also been present during technical discussions between IHEC and its supplier of biometric systems and biometric voter cards.

Many senior officials and political actors have indicated their preference for the use of biometric cards for all voting, as an important counter to electoral fraud, and for including an explicit requirement to this effect in electoral legislation. Biometric voter registration is indeed a valuable contribution to the integrity of elections and, accordingly, an important and urgent task for IHEC, requiring concerted effort with a range of other governmental institutions.

The voter registration process must be complemented by a comprehensive outreach campaign to ensure wide public engagement.

## 2. Audit of Electoral Results Management and IT Systems

UNAMI has shared again with IHEC a list of international audit companies with proven experience in conducting independent audits of IT and results management systems. A governmental committee, created by the Council of Ministers and chaired by an IHEC Commissioner, continues to follow up on the selection of a suitable audit company. IHEC is finalising the technical specifications, scope of work and estimated cost for the audit. This process should urgently move forward, given the importance of such an audit to the perceived integrity of the IT and results management systems for the upcoming elections.

## 3. Political party registration

The registration of political parties continues. So far, IHEC has approved the registration of 230 political parties intending to participate in the June 2021 elections. An additional 72 applications are still in the registration process. This is an increase in party registrations over previous elections (there were 205 registered parties in 2018). Notably, several newly-formed political parties have submitted applications for registration. IHEC will continue to accept and process registration applications until six months before the elections.

## 4. Visits to governorate electoral offices

The IHEC Board of Commissioners continued its field visits to governorate electoral offices to discuss preparations and assess readiness for elections. During October, commissioners visited Qadisiya, Karbala, Ninewa, and Kirkuk (following visits to Erbil, Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah in September). During their visits, the IHEC delegation also met with governorate and security officials, visited voter registration centres and inspected IHEC warehouses to check logistical preparations.



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5. COVID-19 countermeasures

IHEC is acting on UNAMI suggestions to consider potential countermeasures to Covid-19 in its electoral preparations and processes. It has decided to establish a committee comprising the Ministry of Health and the Supreme Committee for Health and Safety, as well as IHEC and UNAMI, to help map out strategies and measures for each stage of electoral preparations to mitigate the potential impact of the ongoing pandemic.

6. Election Security

On 20 October, the Supreme Security Committee for the Elections initiated a security planning process for the upcoming elections. The Committee is chaired by the Deputy Minister for Police Affairs of the Ministry of Interior and consists of representatives from IHEC and various Iraqi security institutions.

7. Invitations for international observation

On 27 October, the IHEC working group for the accreditation of international observers met, in the presence of UNAMI electoral advisers, to discuss progress. A regulation for the accreditation of international observer entities has been prepared and submitted for approval by the Board of Commissioners. The committee has drafted a letter to be sent out to international partners inviting observation of voter registration and the electoral process. It is updating the list of entities to which invitations will be sent, drawing on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' list of diplomatic missions and a list shared by UNAMI of international organisations with expertise in electoral observation.

***Note: UNAMI reminds all stakeholders that electoral preparations must remain free from political interference at all stages. This independence is essential to build trust in the elections and their outcome.***

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